

Deal with death truthfully, Camp says

By Sandy Johnstone
Of the Emerald

Children should be told honestly about the death of a parent, "even if it seems brutal," because then they can deal with the grief more effectively, says Delpha Camp, director of the University's widowed services program.

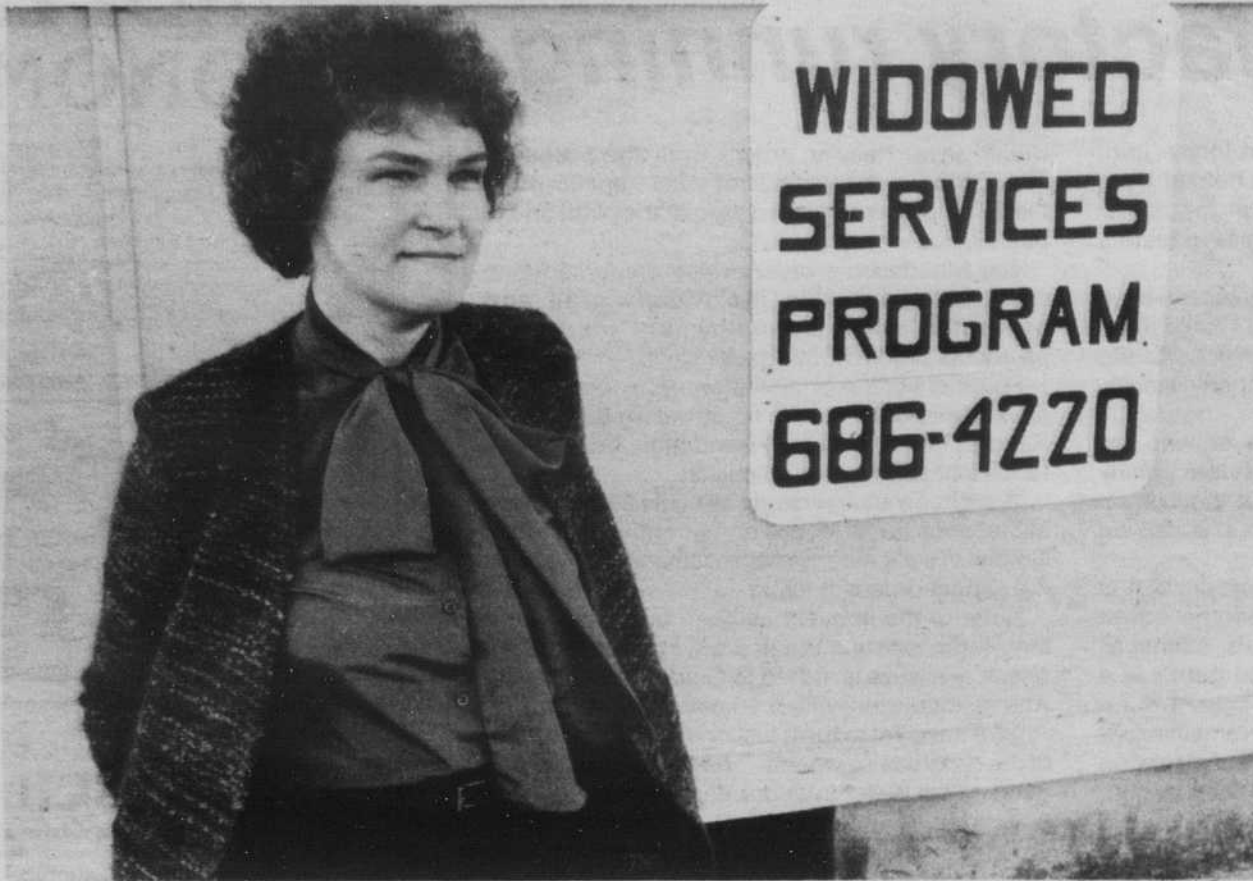
Camp recommends that the remaining parent use the word death or dead to "convey the finality" of death to the child.

Telling a child that "God is lonely and took your mother to heaven" will be "anxiety provoking to a child, because what if he gets lonely again" and takes away the remaining parent, Camp says. Saying the parent "went to sleep" or "got sick" is particularly detrimental because children may become afraid to go to sleep and feel severe anxiety if the surviving parent gets sick even with a cold.

"Children are concerned with their own mortality and others around them," she says. "It's not helpful to give them no information because you think they can't take it."

"They can imagine far worse things," Camp says. "The honesty should be at the level of the child, just enough so he can handle it."

Group meetings for children of deceased parents are sponsored by the widowed services program. The all-volunteer program started the sessions last term and were "very successful," Camp says. She is planning to continue offering the sessions each term, particularly in the summer when



Survivors often need help coping, says Delpha Camp, director of University widowed services.

children are more available.

The first few group meetings are especially difficult for the children and counselors. "We need to get the respect and trust of the children because they are not particularly trustful of adults," Camp says. "It's difficult to get past the teacher/pupil role — they are familiar with it and don't particularly like it."

In the first group, the children's parent had been dead for several

years so Camp had to deal with repressed emotions. "They had all bottled up a lot of feelings and it all came pouring out," she says.

Camp says danger signals which may show an abnormal grief include anger, behavioral problems in school, brooding, crying easily, insomnia and especially an obsession with "if onlys."

"The children seem to exhibit a kind of relief in knowing their

feelings of loss are legitimate," she says. "It is validated by sharing their feelings with other kids who have also lost a parent."

A lot of children feel responsible for the death of a parent, Camp says. This is especially true if a child yelled "I hate you" or even thought it before the parent's death.

Talking it out helps relieve the pain, Camp says, which "leaves the way open to remember the

good times with equanimity." However, she says the pain may return on special occasions such as birthdays or holidays.

Children go through the same basic feelings that adults do after the death of a loved one including shock, disbelief, denial and depression, Camp says. They may also worry about money, especially if there has to be a change in lifestyle or if they think the parent is worried about finances.

One factor the remaining parent should realize is that the children may feel very protective toward them. "There is a tremendous anxiety about the remaining parent, even after the child has stopped mourning," she says.

Many children resent the curiosity of their peers at school because "somehow they feel estranged from their peers. Even with the rising number of divorces and separations a stigma is perceived by the children," Camp says.

She cites one case where children she worked with did not tell any of their friends for three years that their father was dead.

"We hope that (after the sessions) the child feels easier within himself about what happened to him and particularly that we reduced the anxiety, guilt, and anger so he can carry on life with more cheerfulness," Camp says.

"It sounds simple, but it's no small job to accept what happened, let go of the feeling of pain and realize it's not a stumbling block in the way of everything you do."

Craft Center offers diversion

"Some people jog, some use the Craft Center," says Diane Hoffman, assistant coordinator of the EMU facility that has become a popular diversion for University students, faculty, staff and their families.

And just as a person doesn't need to run a four-minute mile to enjoy jogging, one doesn't need to be a master of fine arts to utilize the craft center.

"Most people just want to play at arts and crafts," she says. "We want to set a nice informal environment where people don't have to worry about grades or credit."

At the same time, many serious artisans take advantage of the materials and facilities the craft center provides.

"That's what's kind of neat about it. We've got the serious craftsman as well as the rank beginner working together," says Tom Urban, Craft Center director.

The Craft Center, located in the basement of the EMU, offers instruction, materials and facilities for people of all skill levels interested in photography, woodworking, ceramics, jewelry, painting, sewing, dyeing, metal works, rug making, weaving and many other crafts.

EMU Craft Center membership is \$6, which

enables a person to use the facilities for a term. For \$1, a person may use the facilities for one day.

People wanting to learn a craft can enroll in a variety of instructional workshops which cost from \$7 to \$39. Experienced craftspeople from the community, many of whom are nationally known, are hired to teach a wide array of workshops.

"It's an economical way to study pottery," explained Tewa Werner, a student enrolled in several ceramics workshops this term.

"I just get real inspired working around other people doing the same thing. It makes it real fun," she says.

These half-hour to hour-long demonstrations, called "noon freebies," are designed to instruct people in areas like furniture care, sewing machine operation, doweling, table saw operation, woodworking, photography, welding, and many other topics.

Topics and dates will be posted at the Craft Center.

The Craft Center will be open from 10:30 a.m. to 10 p.m. Monday through Thursday, from 10:30 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Friday, from 10:30 a.m. to 8 p.m. on Saturday, and from 12:30 to 6 p.m. on Sunday.

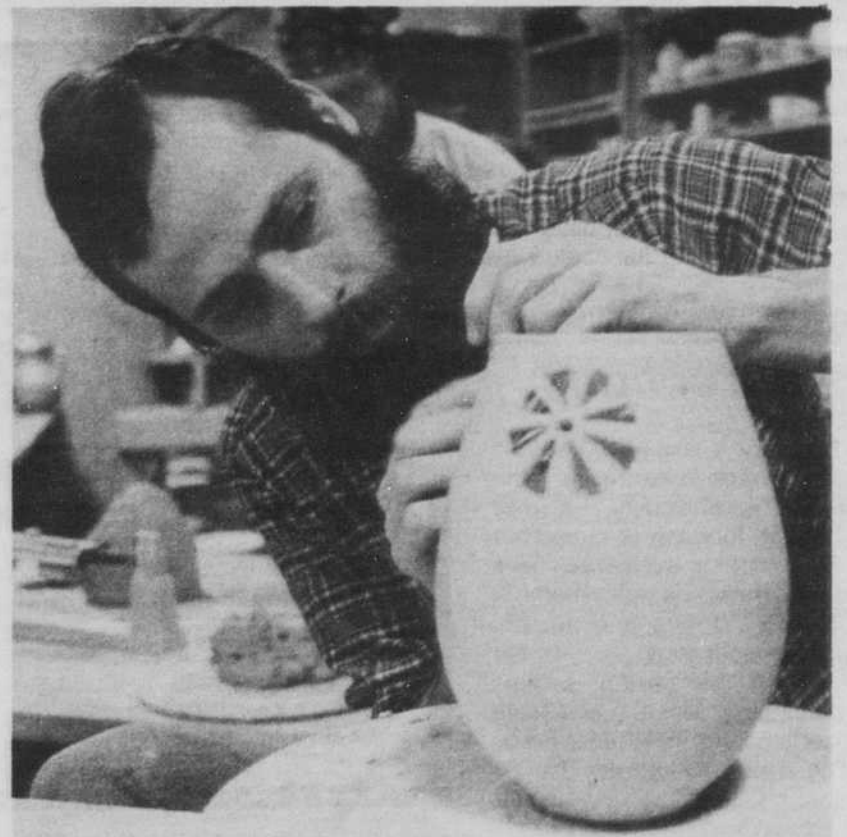


Photo by Bob Baker

Some students jog, some enjoy pottery at the EMU Craft Center.

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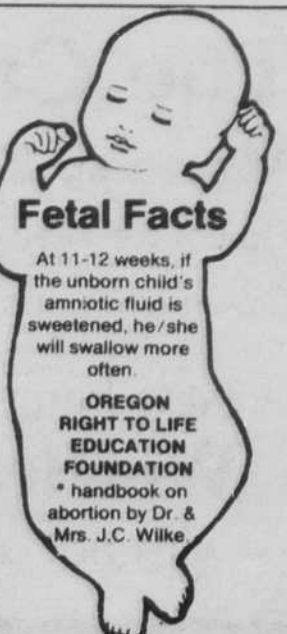
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